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ABSTRACT

Black females are infrequently represented in advertisements in leading fashion magazines and, when they are featured, their presentation may be designed to distance them from the product they advertise. All advertisements in the January and July issues of "Cosmopolitan," "Glamour," and "Vogue" magazines between 1986 and 1988 were examined for the following variables: (1) model's race; (2) cover model's race; (3) number of models; (4) type of product; and (5) view of the model. The following findings are reported: (1) Blacks appeared in 23 of 962 ads (2.4 percent); (2) Asians appeared in five (0.5 percent) ads, and no ads featured Hispanic models; (3) three of 18 cover models were Black (all in "Glamour"), and none were Asian or Hispanic; (4) both Blacks and Whites were more likely to be presented alone than in groups, but a higher percentage of Blacks than Whites were presented in groups than in pairs; (5) Blacks were more likely to appear in clothing ads than in make-up/skin care ads, hair care ads, or alcohol/cigarette ads, but Whites were equally likely to appear in make-up/skin care ads as in clothing ads and twice as likely to appear in these types of ads as in hair care or alcohol/cigarette ads; and (6) Blacks were more likely to be presented in full body view than in face only or in either of the partial body views, while Whites were equally likely to appear in full body view as in face only view. Statistical data are included on four tables. A list of 12 references is appended. (FMW)

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The frequency and portrayal of Black females in fashion advertisements

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Abstract

Social psychological research has given scant attention to the portrayal of Black females in the media. The powerful impact of the media on attitudes and behaviors point to the importance of considering how frequently, and in what ways, minority females are presented in the media. In this research we examined the frequency and portrayal of Black females in the advertisements of leading fashion magazines from 1986-1988. The findings indicated that: 1) Black females appear infrequently in fashion adverstisements, compared to their percentage in the general population, and compared to the readership of fashion magazines. 2) Black females are more likely to appear in full-body view than in face-only view, and are more likely to appear in clothing ads than in make-up/skin care ads. These findings suggest that advertisers present Black females at a "distance," either to avoid associating the product with Blacks, or because Black facial features do not match White standards of facial beauty. Implications of the infrequent use of Black females in fashion advertising are discussed in terms of the self-concepts of Black women.

The frequency and portrayal of Black females

in fashion advertisements

There has been surprisingly little social psychological research on the frequency and portrayal of Black females in advertisements. Humphrey and Schuman (1984) suggested that studying the portrayal of Blacks in the media is important for two reasons. First, it serves to identify the images of Blacks presented to the American public, images which are likely to have larger effects on attitudes and behaviors. Second, the portrayal of Blacks in the media reflects the willingness of White Americans to accept Black Americans into the mainstream of society. Humphrey and Schuman stated that of particular interest are the frequency with which Blacks are presented in advertisements and whether their portrayal is similar to the portrayal of Whites. In the present research we examined the frequency and portrayal of Blacks in the ads of three leading fashion magazines during the time period 1986-1988.

Previous research indicates that media images of Blacks have an impact on both Black and White viewers. For example, Greenberg (1972) found that Black television personalities were a positive source of identification for both Black and White children. Children who watched more Black television personalities had somewhat more favorable attitudes toward Blacks in general than less frequent watchers. Similarly, Bogatz and Ball (1971) found that children who watched the racially integrated show "Sesame Street" had more favorable attitudes toward minorities than nonwatchers. Stronger evidence of a causal relationship between minority viewing and minority attitudes comes from research by Gorn and colleagues (Gorn, Goldberg, & Kanungo, 1976). They found that White preschool children who were shown television inserts of minority children were more likely to want to play

with minority children than a control group not shown the inserts.

Other research has focused on the frequency and portrayal of Blacks in the media, rather than on the effects of presenting Blacks. In general, this research supports the conclusion that Blacks are greatly underrepresented in the media, particularly in magazine advertisements. In 1953 Shuey observed that only 0.5% of popular ads in 1949 and 1950 included Blacks. Much later, Cox (1969) found only a small increase in the proportion and status of Blacks in ads in 1967 and 1968. Colfax and Sternberg (1972) noted a more substantial increase in the percentage of ads depicting Blacks, from 1.7% in 1967 to 7.3% in 1969. However, the authors also noted that only 4% of the total number of people in the ads were Black.

Humphrey and Schuman (1984) conducted the most recent and thorough investigation of the frequency and portrayal of Blacks in magazine advertisements. They examined ads from three magazines, Time, Ladies Home Journal, and Newsweek, focusing on a comparison between the frequency and social characteristics of Blacks in the 1950 ads and those in the 1980 ads. An ad was classified as "Black" if it included at least one Black model. They found that Blacks continued to be underrepresented in ads in 1980. Only 5.7% of the total number of people shown were Black, compared to approximately 12% of Blacks in the general population at that time. The underrepresentation was attributable to the fact that only about one-fifth of the "Black" ads contained only Blacks, and the fact that mixed-race ads contained five times as many Whites as Blacks. Other research has similarly found that advertisers "dilute" the effects of Black models by surrounding them with White models. Some researchers have suggested that this may be an intentional strategy designed to avoid creating an association between Blacks and the product (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970).

Humphry and Schuman's (1984) research also revealed a number of differences in how Blacks and Whites were portrayed in magazine advertisements. For example, Blacks were more often represented as children than Whites, and were more likely than Whites to be presented in a government-sponsored or non-profit organization ad. Blacks were less likely than Whites to be portrayed as high status consumers, and more likely than Whites to be depicted in poverty. More encouraging findings indicated differences between the 1950 and 1980 portrayal of Blacks. In 1980, Blacks were just as likely as Whites to be portrayed in high status occupations, were no longer portrayed in subordinate roles to Whites, and were more likely to be seen interacting with Whites in the ads. However, there was still evidence in the 1980 ads that Blacks were frequently portrayed as depending on Whites, and infrequently portrayed as interacting as social equals with Whites. They were never portrayed in a superior role to Whites.

In the present research we focused on fashion magazine advertisements for two reasons. First, no research exists on the frequency or portrayal of Black females in fashion magazine advertisements. This oversight is surprising in light of the attention Black models have recently received in nonprofessional journals (e.g., "Black models back to stay.", Newsweek, September 12, 1988; "Pioneers in Black Beauty.", Essence, January 1987). The second reason for focusing on fashion magazine advertisements concerns the implications of media generated "beauty standards" for Black women. Research has shown that media standards of feminine beauty can adversely influence the self-concepts of women, often by emphasizing the discrepancy between their own appearance and media standards (e.g., Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986). If the media standards of beauty are exclusively "White standards," because Black models are underrepresented in fashion ads, then

the adverse influence of the media is likely to be greater for Black women than for White women. Thus, it is important to know how frequently, and in what ways Black females are portrayed in fashion magazine advertisements.

We hypothesized that Black females would be infrequently presented in the advertisements of fashion magazines. In addition to counting the frequency with which Black females were presented, a number of characteristic of the ad were also determined. Specifically: 1) the number of models in the ad, 2) the type of product promoted in the ad, and 3) whether the model was presented in face only view, full body view, face plus partial body view, or body only view (no face) view. No specific predictions were formulated for these measures.

Methods

The sample consisted of the January and July issues, 1986 through 1988, of Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Vogue magazines. All of the advertisements appearing in each of the 18 magazines were coded in terms of 1) race of model (Black, White, Asian, Hispanic), 2) number of models in the ad (one, two, three or more), 2) type of product (make-up/skin care, hair care, clothing, alcohol/cigarettes), 4) view of the model(s) (face only, full body, face plus partial body, body only (no face). The race of the cover model was also recorded.

Results

In all, 962 advertisements were coded from the 18 magazines, with a similar proportion of ads coming from each of the three magazines, and from each of the three years. Table 1 contains the frequencies of Black and White females in the ads of the three magazines for the three year period sampled (1986, 1987, 1988).

Consistent with predictions, black females were infrequently found in the advertisements of leading fashion magazines. Only 23 of the 962 ads (2.4%)

contained a black female. Only five ads (0.5%) contained an Asian model and none of the ads contained an Hispanic model. Of the 18 cover models, three were Black (all in Glamour magazine) and none were Asian or Hispanic.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Table 2 contains the frequencies of Black and White females presented alone, in pairs, and in groups of three or more models. Both Black and White females were more likely to be presented alone in the ads than in pairs or in groups (Black females, $^2(2)=17.83$, $p<.05$). However, a higher percentage of Black females were presented in groups than in pairs, although the small frequencies prevented statistical comparison. White models were no more likely to be presented in groups than in pairs.

Insert Table 2 about here.

The frequencies of Black and White females in advertisements for the four product types are presented in Table 3. Black females were more likely to appear in clothing ads than in make-up/skin care ads, hair care ads, or alcohol/cigarette ads ($^2(3)=25.80$, $p<.01$). They were about equally distributed among the latter product ads. In contrast, White females were equally likely to appear in make-up/skin care ads as in clothing ads. They were twice as likely to appear in these types of ads as to appear in hair care or alcohol/cigarette ads.

Insert Table 3 about here.

The frequencies of the four body views for Black and White females are presented in Table 4. Black females were more frequently presented in full body view than in face only view or in either of the partial body views ($^2(3)=35.43$, $p<.001$). White females were equally likely to appear in full body view as in face only view. These differences are consistent with the above findings that Black

females were more likely to be found in clothing ads than in make-up/skin care ads.

Discussion

The results of this research unequivocally supported the hypothesis that Black females are infrequently presented in fashion advertisements. Among the 962 advertisements sampled from leading fashion magazines, only 23 (2.4%) contained Black females, in contrast to the fact that 12.5% of the female population is Black (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986), and in contrast to the fact that, based on subscription rates, Black females comprise approximately 15% of the readership of these magazines. There were no differences in the frequencies with which Black females were presented in the three magazines sampled (Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Vogue), or in the three years sampled (1986, 1987, 1988). Apparently, the fashion advertising world has developed a consensus about how many Black models are appropriate to present in product advertisements.

The results indicated that when Black females were presented, they were portrayed differently than White females. Black females more often appeared in advertisements for clothing than in advertisements for make-up/skin care products. White females were about equally represented in advertisements for these product categories. Consistent with these findings, Black females were more often presented in full body view, an appropriate view for advertising clothing, than in face only view, an appropriate view for advertising make-up/skin care products. White females were equally represented in full body and face only views. One interpretation of these findings is that Black females are more likely to be presented "at a distance" than White females. Whether this is a deliberate advertising strategy, perhaps to avoid creating an association between Blacks and

the product (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970), is unknown. An alternative interpretation of the infrequent use of Black females in facial close-ups is that Black facial features do not "match" the White standard of facial beauty. The validity of this interpretation needs to be examined in future research.

Both Black and White females were more likely to appear alone in advertisements than in pairs or in groups. However, there was a suggestion in the data that Blacks females were more likely to be presented in groups than were White females. Again, this may reflect an intentional strategy aimed at distancing Blacks from the product (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970), or it may reflect the discrepancy between Black facial features and White ideals of facial beauty. Interestingly, research by Choudhury and Schmid (1974) on the effects of black models on consumer behavior indicates that Black models produce more favorable responses from Black consumers, and no less favorable responses from White consumers than White models. However, their research did not consider products typically advertised in fashion magazines. Whether there are benefits, liabilities, or both to using Black models in fashion advertisements, in terms of consumers' behavior, is a question for future research.

Perhaps the most pressing question for future research raised by these findings concerns their implications for the self-concepts of Black women. Does the absence of Black standards of beauty in fashion advertising have adverse effects on Black females' evaluations of their own attractiveness? If so, then the absence of Black females is also likely to have adverse effects on the self-concepts of Black women, since self-ratings of attractiveness are related to the self-concept (see Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986, for a review of this literature).

Field and laboratory research which examines the effects of models' race on the self-concept of the viewer is needed to address this issue.

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Table 1

Frequencies of Black and White females in fashion magazine advertisements: Magazines by year (1986-1988).*

	Cosmopolitan		Glamour		Vogue	
	Black Females	White Females	Black Females	White Females	Black Females	White Females
1986	0	97	4	95	1	121
1987	3	106	4	109	4	107
1988	2	93	1	101	4	110

* All advertisements in the January and July issues were included in the sample.

Table 2

Frequencies of Black and White females presented alone, in pairs, and in groups.

	Alone	In Pairs	In Groups
Black females	18 (78.3%)	1 (4.3%)	4 (17.4%)
White females	682 (72.6%)	132 (14.1%)	125 (13.3%)

Table 3

Frequencies of Black and White females as a function of product type.*

	Makeup/Skin Care	Hair Care	Alcohol/ Cigarettes	Clothing
Black Females	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)	3 (14.3%)	15 (71.4%)
White Females	275 (34.5%)	142 (17.8%)	90 (11.3%)	289 (36.3%)

The 1.6% of the advertisements for other product types (e.g., fragrance, feminine hygiene) are not included in the table.

Table 4

Frequencies of Black and White females as a function of body view.

	Face Only	Full Body	Face + Partial Body	Body
Black Females	2 (8.7%)	19 (82.6%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0%)
White Females	373 (39.7%)	411 (43.8%)	93 (9.9%)	62 (6.6%)